

## [Sally's Premonition]

Approximately 3,500 words

14 C SOUTH CAROLINA WRITERS' PROJECT

LIFE HISTORY

TITLE: SALLY'S PREMONITION

Date of First Writing January 5, 1939

Name of Person Interviewed Estelle Williams

Fictitious Name Sally Jones

Street Address 1706 Thompson Street

Place Columbia, South Carolina

Occupation Cook

Name of Writer Verner Lea

Name of Reviser State Office

"Miss Polly, you 'member dat boy I told you 'bout dat was so nice to me durin' de Fair? Well, on my way home yesterday, I met him up to de fillin' station. Said he was on his way down here to see me. His name is Joe. I didn't know him at first, he was so dressed up. I was fixin' to pass him by, when he reach out his hand and say, 'It's me, Sally. Dis is Joe.'

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"He's a sight in dis world. He 'companied me on home, and we set and talked a long time. He told me all 'bout his old auntie. You know he been livin' wid her ever since he was five year old. Joe say she done a sight o' wranglin' when he mention comin' back to Columbia. Say he sho' had to work his head and lead up to dis town easy-like. Aunt Lizzie think his trip to de State Fair ruint him. She say she never was one for turnin' chillun loose in de city. She holds de country is de place for chillun. Say all dey ever gets out o' de city is high falutin' airs and notions.

"So Joe he jes' humor and wait on her and try to keep her pleased 'til he felt safe to tell her his plans.

"He weeded a patch o' ground for her and got taters and onions and de like planted. Ever time she'd tell him to grab de hoe and sing, he would sho' do it. He say he got so in de habit o' singin' 'til he most sing in his sleep: Nothin' to live for Jes' one time to die; Nigger does de work White folks gits de pie. Spare me, dear Lord, For some o' dat dessert; Den I don't give a d - - - Ef I do git hurt.

"He say Aunt Lizzie brag on his choppin' and singin' so, he figgered de time was 'bout right to tell her his aims. So late de other evenin' she told him to run down de road and git some 'bacco, and when he come back dey would eat. He say she 'pear like she wuz in right good spirits; so, after dey et, he tell her he's got a little confidence he wants to tell her.

"When he told her dat, she got the notion he had done bin tuk up.

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"He laugh, and say, 'No, ma'm, it ain't nothin' like dat. Jes' a plan I been aimin' to tell you ever since I come from Columbia.' Aunt Lizzie say: 'Now here you go talkin' 'bout dat place agin. For de good Lord's sake, tell me what's down dere you so crazy 'bout. Ain't we got de same things 'round here or 'bouts? What is it, Son? I'm tired o' you settin' dere beatin' 'bout de bush.'

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"Den he told her 'bout meetin' me down here at de Fair, and he jes' couldn't get no res' for studyin' 'bout me. Told her I was smart and had a job cookin', and he like my sparklin' eyes and straight black hair, 'cause it shine so pretty. He told me, when he saw me yesterday, to come stan' up side him, 'cause he'd told Aunt Lizzie I jes' come under his arm, and he want to see wuz he tellin' de truth. He carries on a sight o' foolishness.

"Aunt Lizzie told him ef he couldn't get no res', and didn't aim to give her none, to step down to Sudie's and see would she stay wid her while he's gone. He say when he walked through de field Sa'day, carryin' his old worn-out suitcase, he had a reg'lar lump in his throat. He felt like he wuz gonna choke when he looked back and waved at Aunt Lizzie and Sudie. They wuz standin' in de door of de little shack, and watched him out o' sight. He say dey look so low in spirits he holler back and say:

'Nothin' to live for

Jus' one time to die.'

"'Bout twenty minutes after he got to de big road, a man come along on a truck and rode him all de way to town. Joe say people sho' is in a hurry to git where dey's goin' in dis town. He first thought dey wuz another fair down here.

"He say he been thinkin' 'bout me ever since de las' time he see me. He starts workin' at de fillin' station Monday. Mr. Jones, de operator, 4 say he'll pay him five dollars a week and let him sleep on a cot joinin' de station.

"What I wants to tell you, Joe wants me to marry him after he's been there long enough to save a little money. He say it'll be nice for us to take a little honeymoon. Least long as de money las'. He say he ain't never see anybody he'd rather take for his lawful wife. I b'lieves I do love him, Miss Polly. Course he do carry on a heap o' foolishness, but I can tell he's a good boy. I thinks he'll be good to me.

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"He say when de preacher marries us, he reckon he'll think we's de long and de short. Joe, he's over six feet high. But I likes a tall man.

"I told him it make me mighty proud what he say 'bout me. Dat I'd ask you 'bout it, 'cause you wuz always good to 'vise me. I told him I 'spect you'd like to see him so's to pass judgment. Den if you likes his ways, we plan to marry three weeks from dis comin' Sa'day."

After a honeymoon of four days, Sally showed up an animated and happy bride.

"Miss Polly, dere wan't but one thing to upset our pleasure. When Joe come as far as de fillin' station wid me dis mornin', Mr. Jones say he done got somebody else on de job. He say Joe had business to let him know his plans. Course, dis worry Joe pow'ful bad. So he out scratchin' for a job now. I tell him jes' work his head and do de bes' he can 'til his luck hit him. He's a expert crap shooter, but he tell me a fellow can't win les' he can rattle a little change in his pocket. So I let him have fifty cents.

"He say he gonna keep huntin' til he find work. He's proud, ef he is poor. And he don't want me workin' and him doin' nothin'. He say ef it take all de shoe leather off both his foots, he's gonna walk and coax 5 'em to give him work 'til he gits it.

"Twan't much later'n dat when Joe come in de kitchen and say, "Sally, I hear heap o' talk 'bout some work de Government's puttin' out. Dey calls it C.W.A. Whatever dat is. Dey gonna plant eighty-five acres near de Veterans' Hospital in cabbages, beans, taters, onions, squash, cucumbers en 'bout everthing you ever hear tell of. They calls that a project. Den dey aims to give all dis stuff to de poor folks, black and white, what can't buy rashions.'

"Joe say he been down to see de foreman, and dat de foreman seem to like him when he told him he could plow en everthing. He told Joe to come back tomorrow, dat he 'blieve he

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can 'sign him on dat relief work. Joe told him ef he jus' 'sign him, he'd sho' give him more relief dan he ever hope to git. He laugh en say he de one givin' de relief, dat Joe wan't.

“And, Miss Polly, Joe got dat relief job. He sho' was proud. Dey pay him two dollars and forty cent a day, five and a half days a week. De foreman say it 'pear like he got more sense dan heap uv 'em. And bein's he's such a fine plowhand, dey pays him more. De mule he plows is name Nate. He say his de only language dat mule can understand. He keep 'em all laughin' wid his mule talk en singin'. He res' his elbows on his plow handle, and sing: See dat peckerwood Settin' on de rail Learnin' how to figger All fer de white man Nothin' fer de nigger.

Den dey all laughs en jokes, en works harder dan ever.

“Miss Polly, Joe say when dey pays off on de project, he'll give me de money to go see Mattie. She de only sister I got. I got a letter from her. She comin' down here Tuesday week, and she want me to go back wid her 6 for a few days. Ef you can spare me, I could come on back Sunday.”

But on the night before Sally was to return, I heard a faint knock on my door. A thin, scantily clad little Negro girl was admitted. It was Sue, Sally's only child, whose advent into the world was a matter that concerned no one but her mother.

“Miss Polly, Pa got shot. Ma say please let her come over here and spend de night. She say she'll sleep on de floor o' jes' anywhere. She jes' grieve and holler so. She say she can't stay in dat house by herse'f tonight.”

When Sally arrived, she was indeed an object of pity. Tears were streaming down her cheeks, and neither word nor deed seemed to comfort her.

“Miss Polly, I can't stay dere. I can't! I can't! I'll die ef I stay in dat house tonight. I hates it.”

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In her misery and grief, she beat on her head and breast, calling repeatedly on the Lord. Then, in a fit of utter exhaustion, she sank to the floor and related the following:

"Miss Polly, me and Mattie had heap o' pleasure visitin' 'round 'mongst de neighbors. We went out to meetin' one night, and I was jes' nat'ually enjoyin' my visit. But dis mornin' I woke up wid a curious kind o' feelin'. I told Mattie I better git on back. I jes' couldn't get shed o' dat feelin' what kept tellin' me to come or back home. What you 'spose cause dat, Miss Polly?

"Mattie, she tell me to git dem crazy notions out o' my head. Said I was jes' 'maginin' and hearin' things. Say I come to stay 'til Sunday, and to make myse'f satisfied.

"But dere wan't no way in de world I could get shed o' dat feelin' 7 to come home. Mattie wuz plumb outdone wid me when I lef'. When I reach home, Joe wuz settin' in a chair by de fire. He say: 'How come you come back? Thought you say you aim to stay till Sunday?'

"When I told him how come I come home, he most killed hisse'f laughin', and said: 'We got paid off on de project today. You buil' up a fire in de cook stove, and I'll run down to de store and git us a chicken fer supper.'

"I pulled off my good clothes and soon had a fire 'goin' and de pot boilin'. Den I set down to wait for him and de chicken. Seven o'clock come and went. When eight o'clock struck, I begin to git uneasy. I thought 'bout de sign what wuz give me up to Mattie's house. You know Joe's little dog name Fox? Dat dog was layin' dere by de fire sound asleep. After while, he tuk to shakin' same as he had a chill. Den he start growlin', and keep growlin' a little louder. Den he jump up and run up to me and bark and bark, jes' like he want to tell me sumpin'.

"All of a sudden I hear somebody call me. I stood up and saw de shadow of a man flyin' up de alley to my house. He say: 'Joe's shot. Come quick, and I'll take you to him.'

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"Miss Polly, seem like everthing jes' went black. I run in a daze to where he was at, wid Fox right behin' me. He was layin' dere wid de street light shinin' on him. I dropped down by his side and put my hand on his heart. But de life had done gone out. I call and call him, but he never did answer. In his hand he was holdin' de parcel wid de chicken in it.

"De cruelest policeman come up and grab me by de shoulder and say: 'Don't you know dead people can't talk. All o' you git out o' de way and go on 'bout your business.' Den he give poor little Fox a kick, en say, 8 'Ef somebody don't git dis dog out de way, he's gonna git shot, too.'

"Look like dey didn't let Joe git cold good 'fo he was shoved in a ambulance and took to de Funeral Home.

"Ef it jes' hadn't been for dat drunken brawl in dat roomin' house, Joe never would o' been kilt. Two mens got to wranglin' over de same woman. Roy Jones grab a pistol, and de other man run out de house. Den Roy, he shoot through de window and hit my Joe.

"Oh, Jesus, I don't know what I'm gonna do. Joe didn't have no inshoance. I don't know how we gonna bury him. Dat undertaker say when people don't have money for de Coffin en everthing, dey jes' takes 'em out and burns 'em.

The next morning the foreman of the project came in and said: 'Sally, I've just come from the Welfare Board. They will contribute fifteen dollars. The men on the project are making a donation, and, with what you have, we can get Joe buried all right.'

"Oh, Jesus, I sho' is grateful. Now, Miss Polly, ef you jes' let me stay here 'til dey buries him, and jes' go long wid me, de Lord will sho' bless you.

"I got a right pretty black dress and veil one o' de ladies in de church give me."

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Tuesday morning, after the project workers and others had gathered for the funeral, a small figure draped in black entered. She was a symbol of perfect composure. But as the first notes of "Nearer My God to Thee" were heard and the preacher began his chant and eulogy of the deceased, she threw all restraint to the winds.

"Oh, Lordy, there he. Oh! Lordy, I see's him. There he is. Oh! Jesus, how come you take my Joe? There he, Oh! Lordy."

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Annie, supporting her and stroking her shoulder was heard to say: 'Sally, brace up, child, don't carry on so. You'll make yourself down-right sick. Brace yourself. Here come de foreman. Can't nobody hear what de preacher sayin'. And I know he gonna talk pretty 'bout Joe. You knows you want to hear de singin' and prayin.' 'Sides they's got to git through wid dis buryin'. Two days been los' 'count o' that bed o' rock dem gravediggers struck. And the mens has to git back to de project. Now you do as Annie say, and brace yourse'f.'

About eight o'clock Joe started on his last earthly journey. The cold was intense; the ground frozen. Finally, eight white pallbearers lowered his last remains into a grave dug in Potter's Field.

I glanced out of my window, to see a transformed Sally approach the house. She was leaning on the arm of a sympathetic Negro man.

"Miss Polly, dat 'bout the finest car I ever see, what I went de buryin' in. Dat undertaker man so nice. He hold my hand and say he pow'ful sorry 'bout ny trouble. I jes' couldn't he'p but laugh when he say I sho' make a good lookin' widow."

About a week after the funeral, Sally began to complain of a misery in her head, and said: "Miss Polly, seem lak I can't do much good stayin' here. I can't sleep nights, and I ain't able to git my mind set on anything. 'Bout de bes' thing for me and Sue to do is to go to



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Mattie's. I'm gonna git me a nerve tonic, and see can't I git to feelin' right. Den I'll be back. I never will forgit all you done for me."

Four years later I walked in Silver's Dime Store, and there stood Sally. On seeing me, she manifested surprise and embarrassment, as she released the arm of a tall, light-colored Negro. They were standing at the jewelry counter. Sally was trying on first one ring, then another.

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She no longer wore her look of distress and widow's mourning. Instead, she was decked out in one of the stylish pancake-shaped hats, which reposed on her left ear, a red dress and coat, and black suede pumps. Gold earrings and beads completed her costume. The face powder which had been applied a little too generously gave her an ashy look as she greeted me.

"Oh! Miss Polly, I'm sho' glad to see you. I sho' have talked and thought 'bout all of you. Dis my cousin from up de country where Mattie lives. He come to see de Christmas in Columbia." Both displayed large, very white teeth in a broad grin exchanged between them.

"Annie give me your message. Yes'm, she told me, and I'm sho' comin' to see you durin' de Christmas. How's all your girls? Well, you look for me, 'cause I'm sho' comin'. I wants to hear all 'bout you all."

Three weeks later I heard a faint knock on my door. Sally came in timidly and handed me one of her bright red geraniums that she grew in a tomato can.

Always eager to help, she performed first one little odd job, then another. Finally she sat down, and over a cup of hot coffee in the kitchen, her mood became reminiscent.

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“Miss Polly, you know it's 'zactly four years gone dis month since I los' Joe. I sho' miss him. I wish de good Lord could o' spared him, but He know best. You know dat boy I was in company wid in de dime store? He's a good boy, and we been keepin' company for some time. Seems like I got so lonely stayin' by myself all de time. We went 'round to de magistrate's office and got married dat same afternoon. His name is Rufus Allen. He's got steady work at a filling station. Makes six dollars 11 a week. He also picks up a little change in tips, too. I'm maid at a boardin' house on Lady Street. De work ain't so confining, and I get four dollars a week. So if Rufus jes' keep on like he's doin' now, I know we will get along all right. I know he's been true to me so far. But you see we jes' been married a month.”

JJC